

# New Sticks & Heads

Gear Guide



FOR 2015

By Bob Saydowski

Vinnie Colaiuta may never have worn his "I Hit Things" T-shirt if not for the invention of sticks and heads. Okay — he still might have become the baddest cajon slapper on the circuit, but you catch my drift. So for drummers like him, as well as the rest of us mere mortals, a pair of sticks and set of heads is the professional equivalent of the hammer and saw in every carpenter's toolbox. Without them, we simply couldn't do our jobs.

Some folks still refer to drumheads as "skins," and yet these tools have come a long way from animal bones striking hide. Technology has greatly improved sticks and heads for today's drummer with a seemingly limitless number of variations. Sticks

are now pitch-matched, weight-balanced, lacquered, painted, impregnated, wooden-tipped, nylon-tipped, grooved, or dipped. Modern drumheads (while mostly made of that ubiquitous 20th century invention, plastic) boast different colors, textures, thicknesses, counterhoops, collars, and so on. If you're searching for your signature sound or perfect stick, you may just find it in this year's crop of new models. So let's get to it.

## NAME RECOGNITION

We're all looking for the perfect stick, so it's ironic to think that another drummer's model could be the right one for you. And yet you can go all the way back to the glory days of Gene Krupa for proof that Signature sticks have always been popular, and the trend seems as strong

as ever in 2015. This year **Driven Drumsticks** released the Aaron Draper signature stick, which is black with red tips, and modeled after the company's 5A Round Tip stick. \$15.77 per pair MSRP. Also, Lady Gaga drummer George "Spanky" McCurdy has his own Driven model, called "Go 4 Blood." These sticks have a flat lampshade tip and are colored red (they're also available in bright ultraviolet colors of pink, orange, yellow, and green). \$15.77 per pair.

① The corporate culture seemed to change overnight at **Innovative Percussion**. What long appeared to be a rather staid stick and mallet maker, specializing in concert and marching percussion, entered the combo market in recent years with the inclusion of some very high-profile drum

set endorsers. There's no sign the trend will slow down soon, now that Innovative introduced three artist model sticks for 2015, including the JD-1 for hard rock mainstay Jimmy DeGrasso. With its 16.5" length, 0.595" diameter, thick collar, and acorn tip, the JD-1 is built for heavy play. MSRP is \$16.50 per pair.

Innovative also worked with another new endorser, Chick Corea drummer Marcus Gilmore, to fashion the MG-1 model. At a 16 3/16" length and 0.600" diameter, Gilmore's stick finds the middle ground between a 7A and 5A, and features a unique reverse teardrop bead for an articulate cymbal sound. \$16.50 per pair. In addition, the new NZ-1, designed for busy Nashville studio drummer Nir Z., veers closely to a 5B profile, with its 16 3/16" length and 0.600" diameter. But the NZ-1 breaks the mold with an integrated taper that has no visible collar. \$16.50 per pair.

① Innovative Percussion expanded its line of combo models with the Chad Wackerman BR-CW Paintbrush, Jimmy DeGrasso JD-1, Marcus Gilmore MG-1, and Nir Z. NZ-1 signature sticks.





2 Celebrate Rush's 40th Anniversary Tour with the Neil Peart R40 model from Promark, or try the innovative Glenn Kotche Active Wave 570 stick.

Chad Wackerman was among the drum kit endorsers Innovative Percussion signed in 2012, and the company introduced his own signature model stick the following year. This year the company unveiled Wackerman's new BR-CW Paintbrush, a retractable medium gauge wire brush built on a red hickory wooden handle that features a rubber sleeve near the brush fan and a strip of felt surrounding the butt end. Even cooler: The pull rod includes a nylon tip allowing for bright cymbal work. Add the playing surfaces all together — brush swishes, rim-clicks, cymbal swells, and ride patterns — and you get a bunch of interesting colors in one brush. \$89 per pair.

2 For many years it was Pro-Mark. Then it became ProMark. Now the storied company has finally settled on **Promark**, just in time to come out with a limited edition Neil Peart R40 model to celebrate the Rush 40th Anniversary Tour. The R40 is Peart's usual Shira Kashi Oak 747 stick, only with the addition of the R40 tour logo and his signature imprinted in gold. \$21.50 MSRP per pair. (Historical fact: Promark released the Professor's first signature stick back in 1991.)

Promark also announced the new Glenn Kotche Active Wave 570 stick, which is the first of its kind. The hickory

stick features ActiveGrip, which is a heat-activated coating that gets tackier as the player's hands heat up and sweat. While that alone would seem like more than enough coolness to satiate many R&D departments, the 570 also sports a contoured shaft called "WaveHandle," which provides additional grip and a comfy ergonomic handle for your fingers. Specs are 16.75" long with a .570" diameter. \$21.50 MSRP per pair.

It's not easy to sound like Billy Martin, whose limitless improvisational chops can (and do) take him in any stylistic direction at the drop of a hat. But at least you can give it a shot, now that **Regal Tip** has introduced a Performer Series model for the Medeski Martin & Wood drummer. His hickory stick measures 16.37" in length with a .540" diameter and is coated in Regal Tip's PEF (Performance Enhancing Finish) to seal the sticks and increase durability. \$16.75 MSRP per pair.

3 Tim Alexander of Primus recently started using **Vater** drumsticks, which wasted no time fashioning Alexander's

own Player's Design model. Made of sugar maple, Herb's stick is 2B size (16" long x .635" diameter) with a small bead tip. MSRP is \$17.29 per pair.

4 In case you were one of the unfortunate few drummers who missed our bonus 28-page Steve Gadd supplement that was packaged with the last issue (which is still available as a back issue on our web store — just sayin'), this year marks the remarkable drummer's

and pop scene, so his birthday festivities wouldn't be complete without the introduction of Vic Firth's redesigned Steve Gadd 70th Birthday brush. Among the upgrades is a new angle for the wire brush ends, as well as an added third crimp in the pull-handle to allow an additional setting of the wires' spread. Like the sticks, the brushes also feature the special Gadd Birthday logo. \$40.15 MSRP per pair.



3 The new Tim Alexander Player's Design model from Vater

70th birthday. In honor of this once-in-a-lifetime occasion, **Vic Firth** introduced a limited edition Gadd stick with a new, improved black finish and imprinted with a special commemorative 70th birthday chrome logo. For the record: The Steve Gadd stick was the first signature drumstick from Vic Firth, and its specs remain at 15.75" length and a .550" diameter. Available in wood tip (\$17.35 MSRP per pair) or nylon tip (\$17.85).

We all know that Gadd is as revered in the jazz and fusion world as he is within the rock

4 The Vic Firth Split Brush, Steve Smith Tala Wand Slats, and Steve Gadd Limited Edition stick

Speaking of brushes, the new Vic Firth Split Brush is a unique design conceived with input from German drummer Florian Alexandru-Zorn. It has two tiers of medium gauge wire, with one row shorter than the other, which the company claims helps produce varied weighting of sound and more options for articulation. The Split Brush has a retractable pull rod with three crimps for different spread settings, up to a maximum of 4.5". MSRP is \$54.95 per pair.

That "other" venerated Steve, Steve Smith, had already devised two Vic Firth Tala Wand models, and now has introduced a third variation. The Steve Smith Tala Wand Slats model has a foam center surrounded with four flat PVC-wrapped bamboo slats. While



# NEW SIGNATURE MODELS 2015

*Mauro Gilan*

Chick Corea

Length - 16 1/8"  
Diameter - .550"

Innovative  
Percussion

MG-1 *Mauro Gilan* ...

Nir Z  
Studio

Length - 16 3/16"  
Diameter - .600"

Innovative  
Percussion

NZ-1 Nir Z ...

*Jerry DeCesio*  
Black Star Riders

Length - 16 1/2"  
Diameter - .595"

Innovative  
Percussion

JD-1 *Jerry DeCesio* ...

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⑤ Custom stick company Rich Sticks' handmade hickory drumsticks

softer than regular drumsticks, the new Slats model is louder than the other Tala Wands. Specs are .585" diameter x 16.125" long with an MSRP of \$39.95 per pair.

## MAKE YOUR MARK

⑤ At one time, it seemed unimaginable for any other sector of the percussion market besides drums to offer custom-made gear. But following the recent explosion of custom cymbal makers, and even a smattering of custom hardware builders, it doesn't seem so odd to see the emergence of custom stick companies, such as **Rich Sticks**. Based in New Hampshire, the company lathes custom handmade hickory drumsticks that are available either unfinished or with a beeswax coat. Rich claims to dry its wood to a higher 10–12 percent moisture content, which enables the sticks to dent rather than chipping and leaving sawdust all over the floor. Rich Sticks will make "semicustom" hickory sticks (\$7.95–\$8.95 a pair), which are various standard sizes imprinted with the company's logo and your artwork, or "full-custom" sticks (\$10.95–\$15.95 a pair), available in hickory or maple and customized with the exact diameter, length, taper, tip, and finish you desire, either with or without weights, plus custom imprinting.

We also recently ran across **MO Drumsticks**, another custom stick shop, except that in this case the sticks are grooved and weighted. To get started, the company will provide you with a \$9.99 setup kit that includes a single grooved stick, a double grooved stick, various weighted balls, plus grip and finishing tape. Once you determine the grooves and weight distribution you want, your custom MO Signature sticks are \$12.99 per pair.

## FACELIFTS

A number of tried and true drumstick models have gone through some strategic changes this year, either cosmetically or in design, but **Driven** drumsticks went all the way back to square one. As the former U.S. distributor of the Swiss-made Agner

brand, Driven retooled for its debut at the 2015 Winter NAMM show, introducing the two artist models mentioned on page 20, as well as an American Hickory teardrop-tip 5A, measuring 16" x .560" at \$11.77 MSRP. Expect more to come from this upstart start-up!

Pity the poor stick maker, who surely feels compelled to develop new models every year to entice drummers and stimulate sales. But you can't change the basic ingredients of a stick too radically before it turns into something other than a stick. Plus, drummers are programmed to think in terms of 5As and 5Bs whenever it's time to buy a new pair. So sometimes the best option is to just split the difference, which is exactly what **Los Cabos** did with the addition of the 55AB model in to its White Hickory line. Measuring 16" in length and 0.587" in diameter, the 55AB is more than a 5A, but less than a 5B. MSRP is \$14.99 per pair.

⑥ The Los Cabos Think Pink line has expanded to include 5B and 7A hickory models in addition to the existing 5A. The sticks are colored pink from the butt end to the taper, and proceeds go to benefit breast cancer research — a very admirable gesture from this Canadian company. \$17.99 MSRP per pair. Los Cabos also introduced the Power Maple stick, which measures 16.25" x .580" (which, in layman's terms, is a little longer and lighter than a 5B). It's made from Canadian white maple, and has an oval tip. \$14.99.

**Vater** added Fatback 3A and 1A models to its Nude line of drumsticks, which trade a lacquer finish for a sanded, unfinished shaft. Some drummers swear by this natural feel to help aid stick grip once their hands begin to sweat. If you have a problem with

⑥ Los Cabos expanded its Think Pink line with proceeds going to benefit breast cancer research.



slippage, the Nude models may be the answer (\$15.29 MSRP per pair).

Standard 5A and 5B sticks have long had teardrop-shaped tips, but **Vic Firth** is bucking convention with its new Barrel-Tipped 5A and 5B drumsticks. Barrel-tip sticks are known to provide a more focused cymbal sound, so for those players already in love with 5A or 5B sticks, these new options may offer a cool alternate sound without sacrificing length and diameter. MSRP is \$15.25 per pair.

### GET A HEAD

All those various new drumstick models we just detailed would be rendered unusable without an appropriate surface to smack. In that sense, sticks — forever married to heads in the most literal sense — should be overjoyed by the new options available on the drumhead market.

**7 Drum Workshop** has put its own branded Remo USA heads on DW drums for quite a while, and now the company is offering the new 2-ply AA DW/Remo heads, made from Dupont A film. Available in coated or smooth white, the heads use Remo's patented Crimplock collar that combines both glue and a crimped hoop. A full range of sizes includes 10" to 15" in coated only for snare drums (\$22-\$28), 8" to 18" for toms (\$24-\$48 MSRP), and 18" to 24" for bass drums (\$66-\$76).

**8** On the other side of the spectrum, the Reso 7 from **Evans** is a single-ply, 7mil coated thin white drumhead made expressly for the resonant side of toms. Said to provide a shorter sustain without the need for muffling, while still retaining a full tone, Reso7 heads are available in 6" to 18" sizes from \$28-\$48.25 MSRP.

Many drummers are playing unorthodox setups built around 16" bass drums, so the timing couldn't be more perfect for Evans to introduce a 16" model into its popular EMAD, EQ4, EQ3-NP, and G1 Coated lines. Available in bass hoop and tom hoop versions to accommodate converted floor toms and stock mini bass drums, the new 16" drumheads are available for \$61-\$82 MSRP.

**9** It seems like Steve Smith has had a busy year. In addition to his

**DW** now offers its branded Remo heads for individual sale.



**8** The Reso7 from Evans is made expressly for the resonant side of toms.

new Tala Wands, the legendary rock/jazz chameleon inspired yet another product: this time, a kick drumhead. The **Remo** Powerstroke 3 Black Dot bass drumhead features the popular single-ply 10mil Powerstroke film, combined with its 10mil thin ring underneath the outer edge of the head, as well as a 5mil Black Dot impact patch on the beater side. Available in both



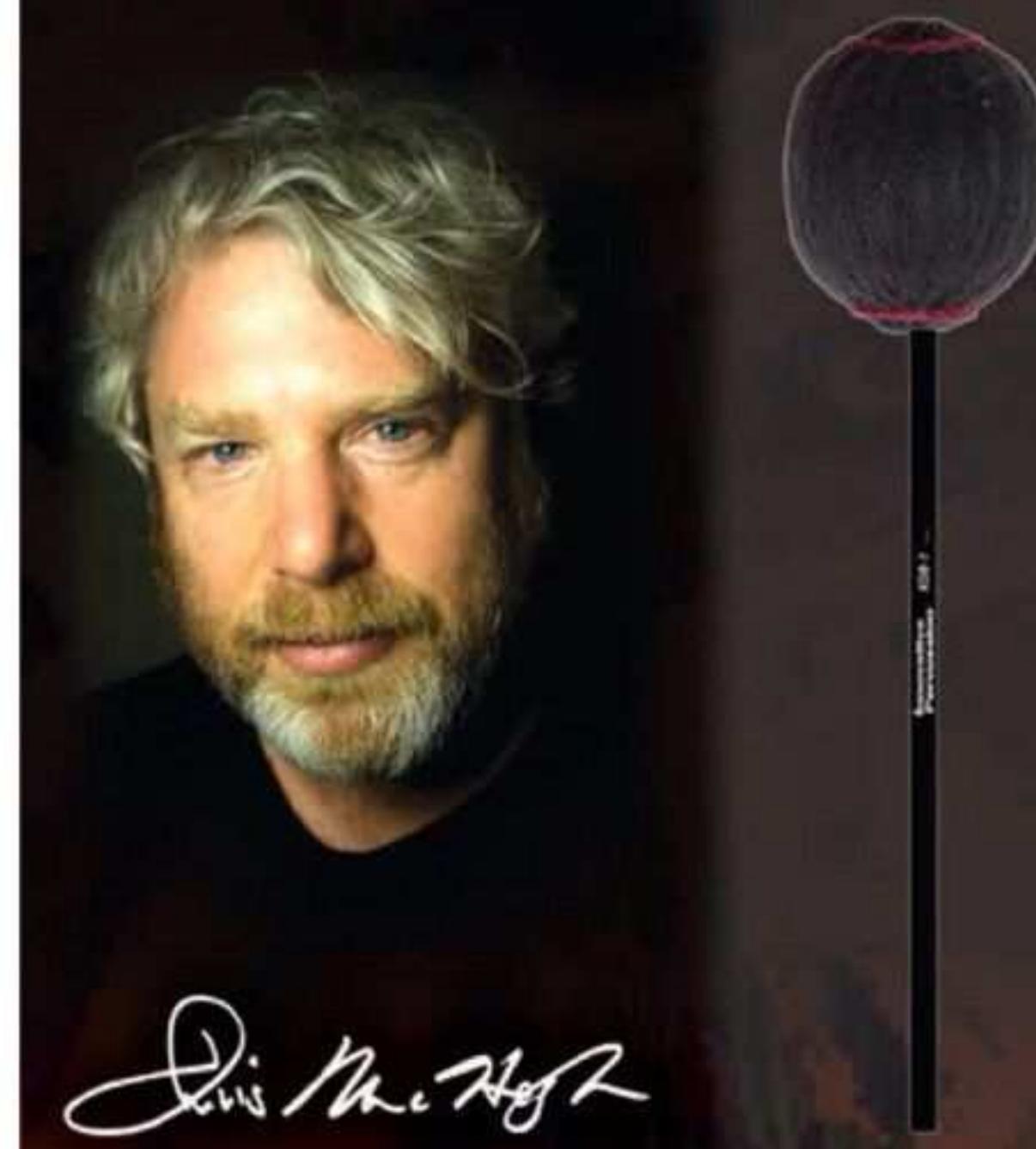
**9** Remo's Powerstroke 3 Black Dot bass drumhead

clear and coated, from 18" to 26" (including a 23" for DW players), P3 Black Dot heads are designed to provide deeper tone, focused attack, and increased durability. MSRP from \$69.40-\$89.10.

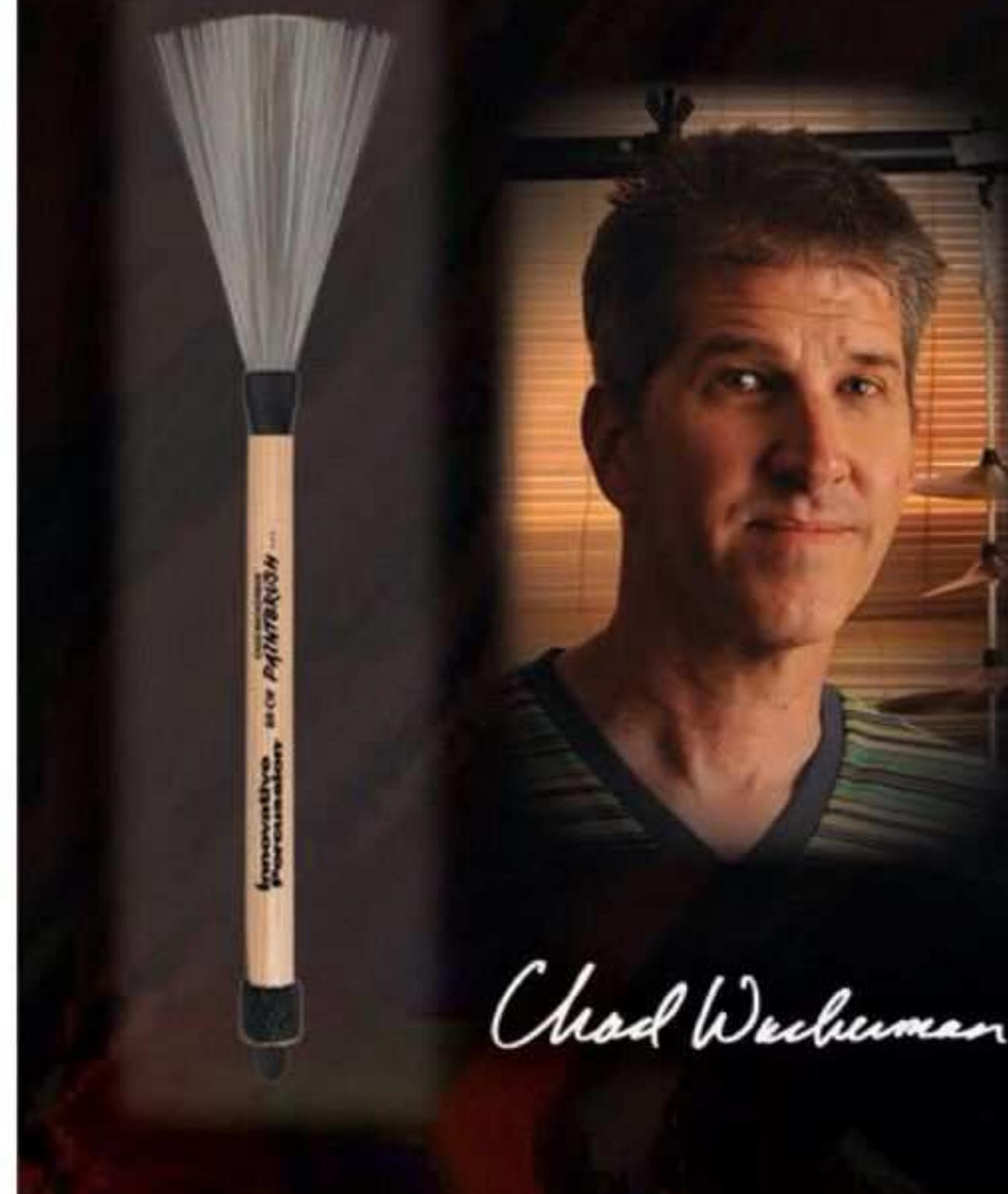
If you're looking for an ultrasturdy snare drum batter head, the new Remo Powerstroke 77 sounds like the answer to your prayers, with two plies of 7mil Mylar plus a 7mil underlay ring, and a 5mil clear center dot. Only white-coated finish is available in 10", 12", 13", and 14" sizes. \$32.30-\$36.50 MSRP. □

## NEW DRUMSET PRODUCTS 2015

### KDB-1 CHRIS MCHUGH KICK DRUM BEATER



### BR-CW CHAD WACKERMAN PAINTBRUSH



**Innovative Percussion Inc.**

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